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DREAMARTS IMPACT STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Chris Blois-Brooke & Dr Selina Busby, February 2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary document gives an outline of the key findings of this Impact Assessment study which can be found in full at www.dreamarts.org.uk.

“[DreamArts] saw in me the things I didn’t, and brought the best out of me.”

OVERVIEW OF DREAMARTS

- An outreach charity supporting three hundred 7-25 year-olds every year.
- Utilises a creative Arts-based methodology to “empower and inspire” their participants.
- Runs three programmes:
 - Express** - a flexible, targeted programme designed to be creative and therapeutic for the young people most in need and at risk.
 - Experiment** – affordable creative workshops on the weekend for young people living in deprived areas.
 - Expand** – a programme of personal development for young people to develop creative leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

CONTEXT

DreamArts works with young people from across Westminster, currently one of the most unequal boroughs in London.

It is ranked 3rd worst borough in the UK in terms of child poverty¹. Across the borough 37% of youth are living in poverty¹ and in some of the wards where DreamArts works this figures rises up to 78%. Indeed, Westminster has “the third highest pay ratio between the 20th and 80th percentiles and the third highest proportion of out of work benefits claimants”².

In this area of deprivation and inequality DreamArts use the Arts to enable young people to explore who they are, make positive life changes, build healthy support networks and develop a sense of community.

THE IMPACT STUDY

DreamArts has developed a unified internal approach to evaluating its *Outcomes*, an approach that is unique in the sector. However, wanting to pursue best practice, the trustees of DreamArts approached The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama to build on the internal evaluation of programme outcomes, by conducting an assessment of DreamArts’ *Impact*.

Numbers and ranks of child poverty HMRC 2011				
	Rate	Number (aged 0-19)	Rank in London <i>Out of 33</i>	Rank in GB <i>Out of 409</i>
HMRC measure 2011*				
Westminster	37%	12,750	3	3

¹HMRC 2011 census report (see graph above)

²London’s Poverty Profile: New Policy Institute



Participants, and their parents, share glowing reports of DreamArts' Impact and, speaking with 28 former members, it was immediately clear that they felt that their participation in DreamArts had a great impact upon their lives as they were growing up, as some of their words powerfully demonstrate:

“DreamArts helped me to make the choices that made me who I am.”

“It was an integral part of forming you as an adult [...] you're not only able to create things but you're able to kind of grow in a safe environment which is so important and so rare when you're that age and in London.”

“DreamArts was really inspiring and helpful for me.”

“I just hope to come back in 10 years and to see that DreamArts still continue their great work by offering such brilliant projects, support and touching the hearts of more teenagers and young adults like myself.”

“There is so much stuff they have helped me achieve going forward.”

This Impact Assessment study not only reflects such sentiment, but also points towards *how* DreamArts is able to achieve the significant impacts that it does.

As such, this Impact Assessment study will allow DreamArts to deepen its understanding of how the participation across the varied programmes impacts upon young people's lives. DreamArts will use the results of this study to refine, develop and enhance its practice.

It is recognised that impact is harder to measure than outcomes because, dealing with inherently personal experiences, the measurement of impact is less objective and so using standardised monitoring systems is less effective.

In order to examine how well DreamArts is achieving its intended impacts, **the study asks the following questions:**

- How does DreamArts enable young people to realise their full potential?
- How does DreamArts enhance aspirational thinking and goal building?
- How does DreamArts challenge young people's negative views of themselves?
- How does DreamArts develop soft and transferable skills?
- How does DreamArts develop support networks and a sense of community?



FINDINGS

Examining how well DreamArts achieves their intended impacts, **the study finds solid evidence that participation in DreamArts impacted children and young people's lives by developing their:**

- greater sense of self-worth;
- coping skills and resilience;
- aspirations to achieve and contribute, *and*
- improved relationships with peers and adults.

Each of these key impacts is not only integral to all of DreamArts' programming, but also has a significant impact on young people's abilities to overcome disadvantage.

Although the study examines other associated impacts for Children and Young People in briefer detail, there is still remarkable evidence to determine DreamArts' success in developing their participants':

- awareness of their impact on the world;
- abilities to make better life choices;
- engagement in further learning;
- reduction in negative behaviour, *and*
- opportunity to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Above and beyond these impacts on participants' lives, this study also points briefly towards very positive impacts of DreamArts' work on society, as well as for the partner agencies with whom DreamArts works.

The remaining section of the Executive Summary will explore each of these impacts in greater detail.

Achieving a greater sense of self-worth

"I didn't have high self-esteem prior to starting DreamArts but look what I was able to do."

"[I felt] proud of myself because, after the gala, I had proven to those who said I couldn't do it, that I could."

A unanimous theme from this study is the profound ability of DreamArts to increase young people's self-worth. Participants feel valued, and as one interviewee states, *"if you think about it, that's all you want as a young person [...] I want what I'm thinking and what I'm doing to be validated. And that's what DreamArts did"*. This enables the disruption of young people's negative views of themselves. *"When I first came to DreamArts I felt like I wasn't good enough"*, recalls a participant who felt like dropping out, *"[but] I'm still here"*.

Many well-run Arts projects should be expected to increase participants' self-confidence. However, it is clear that DreamArts increases self-confidence with particular breadth and depth. The sustained improvement in self-worth emerges from all the opportunities young people have to share, present and perform both their work and their ideas through a variety of art forms. Projects allow each participant to find their own niche but, crucially, also lead participants outside their comfort zones.





This study finds that DreamArts achieves improved leadership skills and a willingness to take creative risks and, most significantly, produces a marked improvement in communication skills - particularly in young people's ability to talk to new people and ask responsible adults for help.

An increase in participants' self-worth also supports their academic performance.

"[DreamArts] gave me more confidence in school", states one participant, while another laments that they had been disengaged both with learning and in life but that *"after I went [to DreamArts] I realised that you can actually have fun [...] and learn as well"*.

Furthermore, 65% of participants are from homes where English is a second language and there is evidence that DreamArts impacts upon their confidence in their language abilities. One former participant, for example, describes how DreamArts *"made me feel comfortable even though my level of English was a barrier at the time."*

"If there were more youth theatres like DreamArts, it would make London a better place."



Developing coping skills and building resilience

“There are ups and downs. It helps you to negotiate the downs.”

Young people who work with DreamArts develop the ability to cope better and build resilience. Many participants, and alumni, told us that these skills had a profound impact on their lives. *“Prior to working with DreamArts I never had the greatest resilience however [participating in the programme meant that] after making a few small mistakes I began to bounce back easily”.*

DreamArts achieves this through the numerous opportunities it provides for young people to express feelings, talk about challenges and learn how to manage difficult emotions, such as anger, through the fictional environment of, for example, characters in a drama. Trained staff support participants to work through stressful experiences (such as preparing for performances) in an emotionally healthy manner. Staff create a safe, supportive workshop environment that helps participants develop self-discipline and self-motivation to achieve their aims.

The emotional support provided by DreamArts has a significant impact upon participants’ ability to manage the effects of anger, shyness, anxiety and, perhaps, emotional, domestic and/or sexual abuse. *“You make me see things differently”,* states one DreamArts participant, *“[...] I don’t just lose my temper, I can think of options, I talk things through.”*

Aspiring to achieve and contribute

“I could never afford to go to a Performing Arts school,”

states one participant who is now an award winning playwright and budding filmmaker.

“Without DreamArts I would never be in theatre. They gave me the confidence and skills to make this my career.”

DreamArts has a profound impact upon young people’s confidence in their ability to achieve. Whilst participants’ aspirations can often be low before joining, DreamArts’ programmes raise their expectations of what they can achieve. This is done partly through staff members’ consistent encouragement and support, and by fostering aspirational thinking. One alumnus admitted, *“I didn’t have a lot of direction as a teenager, I was quite wayward”,* and that her involvement with DreamArts had helped her *“utilise my skills [...] get organised [...]it gave me a sort of purpose”.*

Young people become motivated and engaged by opportunities suited to their differing needs and interests. DreamArts gives young people a sense of accomplishment through which they can explore themselves and aspire to achieve. The sheer variety of activities provided by programmes is also significant as participants learn *“a lot about ourselves by doing things we never thought we could do”,* as one alumnus described. This newfound attitude helps them to contribute, to imagine new horizons and to fulfil their potential.

Crucially, DreamArts’ programming allows for the fact that ‘achievement’ means something different to each unique individual. Participants are encouraged to set short,



medium and long-term goals that they work towards. This way they have a structure, the space to reflect and the motivation to push for excellence.

DreamArts offers vitally important opportunities for young people to contribute to the cultural landscape of their neighbourhood. While the creative industries and cultural institutions of the West End may be on their doorstep, most new participants have no experience of participating in, or benefiting from, this cultural landscape. Many develop creative skills, which are not only completely new to them, but would have been impossible to learn were it not for DreamArts. Numerous alumni have gone on to successful careers in the creative industries.

Improved relationships with adults and peers

“It’s about learning to work with others. It’s a life skill.”

Participation in DreamArts has a significant impact in terms of members improving their existing relationships with peers and adults, as well as their ability to meet, and get on with, new friends. This not only improves the lives of the young people themselves, but also strengthens their families and wider communities. This impact is particularly valued by those young people who said they lacked friends and support before they joined DreamArts.

DreamArts achieves this impact through providing an environment in which participants are given the opportunity to meet, and meaningfully communicate with, a large diversity of new friends. However, DreamArts is more than just a social environment. Programmes challenge young

people to work together with different people to achieve shared creative goals. This task-oriented group work encourages understanding and cooperation, within a supportive environment that fosters a sense of camaraderie. Young people learn to observe, praise and encourage or support one another in a way that improves their motivation and outlook both in the short- and long-term.

This collaborative working environment not only develops young people’s ability to relate with peers but also with adults. One Experiment participant commented that she had *“learned to make eye contact with adults”*, while an Express participant said that *“the girls group helped me be able to talk to teachers about life in the UK.”*

The DreamArts work that is explicitly about family relationships helps those whose relationships are problematic. As one parent participating in the Family Express programme commented, *“My children enjoyed the arts and crafts and spending time with me in this way, especially being able to talk about feelings”*.



Awareness of their impact on the world

DreamArts *“wasn’t training for me, but really a journey where I found myself again [...] It has allowed me to realise my potential [and...] has given me tools to have a positive impact on people.”*

DreamArts works to help children and young people to become aware of the effect they can have on the world around them. Programmes give young people the opportunity to see the impact they can have on peers and adults when they share their views with others. This includes communicating their ideas and life experiences with audience members. In this manner, an alumnus suggests that DreamArts is *“an amazing project based way of getting together to voice our opinions on other matters”*.

DreamArts adapts to the needs and desires of participants. An excellent example of this is the Express programme, in which groups choose an art-form through which to explore a subject of their own choosing.

One participant describes the mindset of DreamArts’ staff being *“we hear you, we see you, we want to work with you, we want to give you every opportunity that we can to make what you’re thinking in your head become a reality”*. This child-led approach is significant because, by drawing upon young people’s skills, strengths and talents, staff are able to demonstrate the unique potential that each young person brings to the world around them.

Ability to make better life choices

DreamArts is, *“helping me make the right decisions.”*

Programmes help participants prioritise their goals by providing a positive focus in their lives. One participant describes how DreamArts was *“helping me make the right decisions”*, while a Partner Agency staff member provided an example of several girls who, *“as a result”* of participation in DreamArts, have felt able to *“stand up for themselves when boys tease them”* and have broken up unhealthy relationships with boyfriends.

Parents comment on how the discipline of practising a creative art-form has helped develop time-management skills, a sense of independence, a mature outlook and improved self-image.

Engagement in further learning

“I had to speak spontaneously in German about a topic which, I think, is where acting helps.”

Respondents to our study comment that working with DreamArts has given them the confidence to develop their interest in, and resolve to, pursue educational aspirations in a variety of subject areas.

Participation in DreamArts helps young people to enjoy learning and to try new things. The soft skills gained by participation in the Creative Arts play a supportive role in the study of other subjects. For example, one



participant describes how, despite choosing subjects which are “*nothing related to what I did in the Performing Arts*”, the skills they developed through DreamArts have been useful in A-Level study.

Reduction in negative behaviours

DreamArts, “*was like a training ground [...] I could [...] say the wrong things, do the wrong things, be imperfect and have an almost unconditional love anyway.*”

Levels of concentration and cooperative behaviour dramatically improve through participation in DreamArts. A reduction of negative behaviours *within* workshops appears to be correlated by a similar decrease in negative behaviour *outside* the DreamArts sphere. Anecdotally, from young people and Partner Agencies, the likelihood of being in trouble at school, or with the police, appears to be much higher prior to participation in DreamArts programmes than afterwards.

This marked improvement in behaviour is brought about by the skilled facilitation of sessions by practitioners who not only come with experience in the use of Arts-based practice but also, through DreamArts training, are given further skills and knowledge in Therapeutic Arts practice. This enables staff to work with young people whose behaviour might be challenging by incorporating an attachment-based approach called PACE. PACE stands for Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathetic, and is informed by a knowledge of neuro-science.

Moreover, the Programmes’ focus on supporting young people to be open-minded and reflective is also significant in achieving this impact. “*You’re discussing really important issues from a very young age and you’re becoming socially aware*”, suggest an alumnus. Not only does such social awareness make participants more well-rounded and tolerant of other people and their ideas, but it also encourages young people to reflect on their own views and choices.

Having fun and enjoying themselves

DreamArts “*is a place you can come if you had a rough day.*”

DreamArts is “*the highlight of my week. It keeps me going through the school week.*”

The programmes allow participants the time and space to have a good time, which is influential on young people’s emotional well-being. Having fun means young people come back and engage meaningfully in the programmes, helping to explain all the other benefits of DreamArts.



Impact for society

Above and beyond the impacts on the individual children and young people themselves, youth participation in DreamArts also has a wider-scale social and economic benefit.

Engagement with DreamArts gives children and young people a sense of purpose, a creative outlet and a source of support in their lives. In this way, DreamArts not only prepares young people for successful careers, but also for healthy and happy lives through the social skills they learn, the emotional support they gather, and the passions they develop from the programmes. Participation in DreamArts also contributes to the development of soft skills that are demanded by the job market. As such, participation in DreamArts should be seen as reducing the risks of academic underachievement, unemployment and anti-social behaviour.

Furthermore, DreamArts broadens access to the Arts and Culture and significantly contradicts the national trends identified by the Warwick Report (2015) which concludes that, “access to opportunities for creative self-expression is currently socially stratified and restricted for many women, ethnic minorities and disabled people” (7). Three-quarters of DreamArts’ participants are young women, 78% have BME backgrounds and 18% are identified as having special needs.

In providing access to the Arts, DreamArts offers effective vocational training for young creatives, thereby contributing low-cost training to get more young people into employment, and producing work, in the Arts & Culture sector.

Westminster has no Arts and Culture hub with a remit for engaging local residents comparable with other inner London boroughs (e.g. The Tricycle in Brent, The Roundhouse in

Camden, Oval House in Lambeth, The Lyric in Hammersmith). As such, the role of DreamArts in engaging a diverse section of young people in the Arts is a cause for celebration.

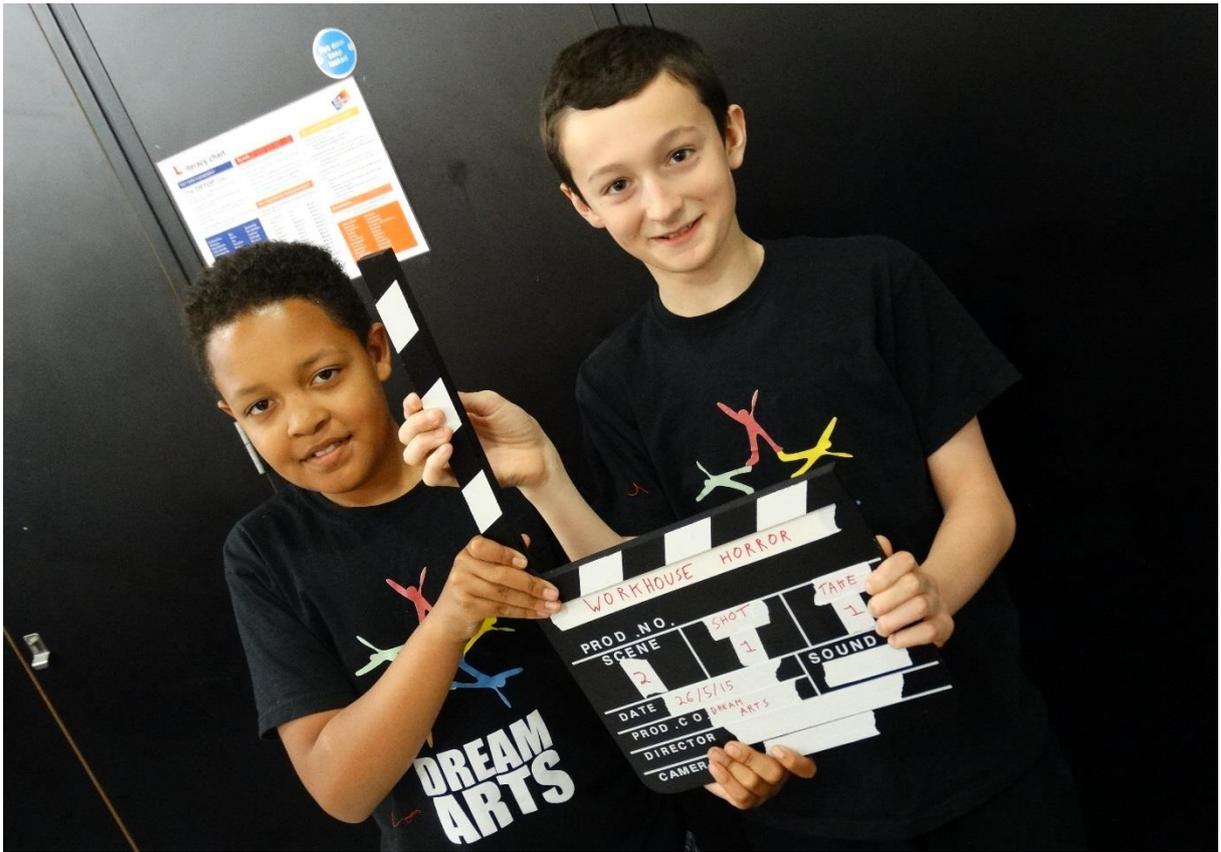
Impact for Partner Agencies

“Working with DreamArts in this powerful way allowed me to build strong positive relationships with young people who I may not have had a chance to work with.”

Participation in DreamArts’ Express targeted programmes also produces positive Impacts for Partner Agencies. The programmes help Agency staff build trust with their participants in a fun and meaningful way, whilst helping to devise ways of identifying needs.

DreamArts is also successful in re-engaging clients/students in learning opportunities and can provide young people with the benefits of a creative education that schools may currently be unable to fulfil. DreamArts’ programmes are also valuable to Partner Agencies in terms of engaging with those young people whose needs are not being met through alternative provision, such as sport.





CONCLUSIONS

DreamArts is a model of exemplary practice within the Youth Services sphere.

DreamArts is able to improve the life chances for those most at risk within society, by not only preparing young people for successful careers, but also for healthy and happy personal lives.

DreamArts' programmes are a model of best practice in terms of involving those who are very often underrepresented in the cultural landscape, and in terms of fusing creative, personal and social development.

Partner agencies would benefit from engaging with DreamArts as it would enhance their ability to have a positive impact on the lives of the young people they work with. This will also benefit DreamArts as it will enable the organisation to sustain and develop its work.

We are confident that future studies and research will draw similar conclusions to ours in their commendation of the DreamArts methodology as a model of exemplary practice.

Notwithstanding this assessment, **we would call for more research into DreamArts' impact**, as well as for the continued and ongoing development of DreamArts' internal and external evaluation systems. This, we believe, will not only allow the organisation to achieve greater impact for the Children and Young People themselves, but also greater impact through the dissemination of its work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- DreamArts are pioneering and integrating their own Theory of Change and a self-evaluation system that underpins the work of the charity. As a result, it is possible to measure the outcomes that participation in these Arts projects has on young people throughout all of the strands of DreamArts' programming and other providers would benefit from adopting a similar strategy.
- We would recommend disseminating the good practice of DreamArt beyond arts organisations to reach youth sectors and policy makers.
- We would recommend increased contact with industry partners in the form of workshops and career information events would enable those participants who might be interested in the career paths in the arts.
- We would recommend increased contact with drama schools and educational partners who could offer HE advice, audition training and workshops or taster sessions in a wide variety of arts based courses.
- DreamArts is offering a unique role within the borough of Westminster which offers little in the way of creative opportunities for its young residents. We would recommend the development of a funding call to the creative industries that are also in the borough.



Likelihood to recommend project
 Learn new skills
 Explore thoughts & feelings
 Show your skills

Share ideas
 Positive relationships
 Take a lead

Figures reflect the percentage of total respondents that suggests that DreamArts has helped them improve in each of the respected areas.

DreamArts saw in me the things I didn't, and brought the best out of me

I realised that you can actually have fun and learn as well

DreamArts gave me more confidence in school

I didn't have high self-esteem prior to starting DreamArts but look what I was able to do

